29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

[233] more practical purpose of tethering the cattle as towards sunset they come winding back from the pasture. In the hot months, if there is no danger from lions, they are left all [513] night in the open and the byre is used as a dormitory by the [342] boys and unmarried men of the village. It is the custom, too, for the unmarried girls to sleep together in vacant huts in [592] the village, for the sleeping hut of a household is reserved for the householder and his wife and small children.

[415] The rear part of the store hut is taken up by an enormous circular grain basket, four feet high and the same in diameter, standing clear of the floor on a wooden, three-legged stand and safe from the depredations of white ants. [252] Whenever possible, cooking is done outside, but during the rains it is done over a fire of sticks or millet stalks burning in a hollow scooped out in the floor near the wall. A variety [415] of pots clutters the floor space: the large earthenware water pot, an earthenware pot and a shallow iron dish for cooking, small beer pots, a number of drinking bowls made from the tough rinds of gourds neatly halved and dried in the sun. [353] The roofing poles, resting on the mud walls and rising to an apex, form convenient places for tucking away household goods and personal treasures. Such an item one cannot fail [241] to notice is that of several large heads of grain; these are [261] stored for the next season's planting, and no matter how desperate the food situation may become, they will remain untouched, for the next year's supply of food depends on this stock of seed. Behind the poles also may be found a fragment of a mirror, a couple of cigarette tins holding a little oil or a handful of beads, a girl's blue dancing cloth or even the [292] good wife's best Sunday frock, run up for her by the Sisters from some material brought from Kodok, probably some dreadful riot of green and red and yellow, hideous indeed to Western eyes, but to the proud owner more delightful than any Paris creation. Sometimes, to a visitor's distress, a line [251] is slung across the hut on which hang dried fish or strips of meat. The high tone of these delicacies, the myriads of flies they attract and the thick, black smoke of the fire which, having no means of getting away, fills the hut, do not make

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

they might as well go home again. And go home many of them did, regardless of the fact that whilst at the mission they would get some sort of a daily ration, there would be nothing for them at the parental board, not even a welcome.

Those who remained got a little extra in consequence of the defection of their fellows, and in order to supplement their slim diet still more I divided the school into two and on alternate days sent one half to fish for the benefit of everybody whilst the other half had class, and bought a bull each week to provide them with a couple of meat meals.

And so we struggled on from month to month until in June the importation of beans from Egypt eased matters considerably, and eventually with the arrival of the new crops in mid-September the crisis was passed.

The unfortunate people outside the mission did not fare so well. True, periodic allotments of grain were made at various central villages that boasted a shop or two, but it was impossible to devise an equitable system of rationing, and since many people were several miles from these centres, the possession of money did not guarantee that there would be grain left by the time they had tramped the hot and dusty road to the shop. For the most part they subsisted on roots and grass and occasionally a decent catch of fish would enable them to forget their misery for a time.

We heard of many instances of suffering and endurance during these dreadful months; how a young mother alone in a hut with her newly-born baby, in trying to lift herself up to reach for a drink of water fell on the infant and killed it; how a woman in search of food walked from Detwok through the Shilluk country to Kaka some fifty miles to the north, there crossed the river and continued her quest among the equally stricken Dinka tribe, and making a huge semi-circle through rough country, eventually recrossed the Nile opposite Detwok and came home empty-handed, having covered about 150 miles on foot.

One morning when I was going across to the school I saw two little children in the Sisters' compound trying to pick out the few grains of millet seed that had fallen into the